

# The 2026 NFL Playoffs in Focus: Performance, Pressure and Public Perception

A data-driven look at the key drivers of conversation, sentiment, and attention throughout the NFL season.

Analysis based on public data collected through the Brandwatch tool.

Analysis period from December 11 to January 11, 2026.

Mentions collected in English.

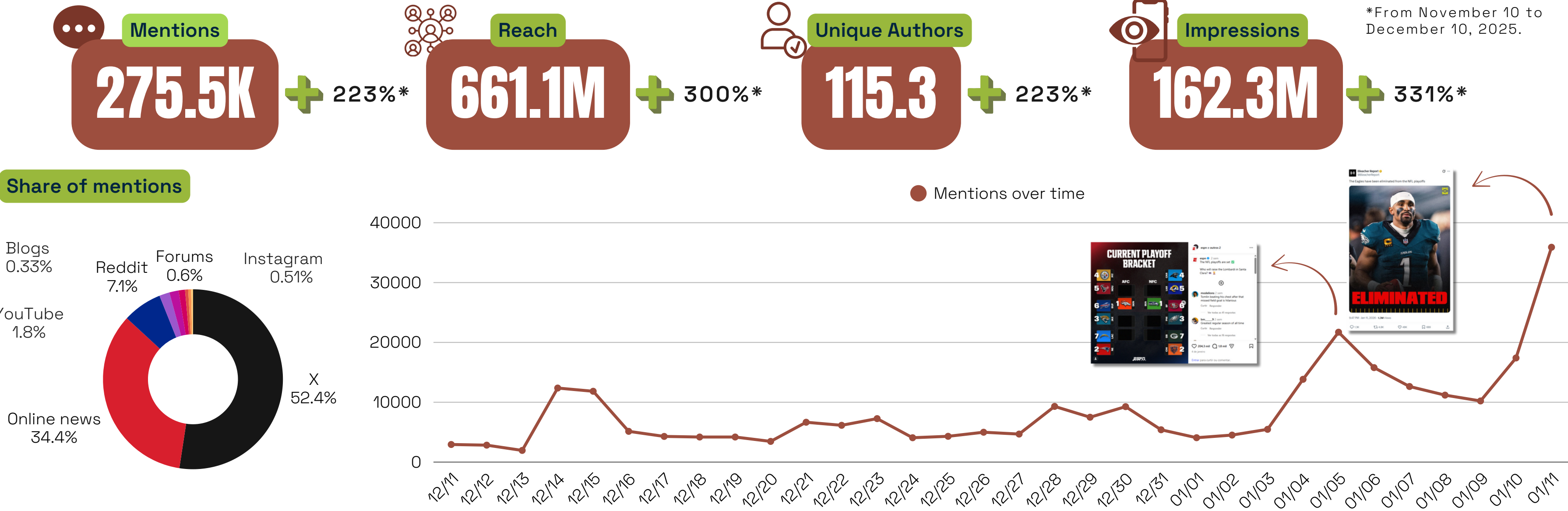




# NFL PLAYOFFS DRIVE MASSIVE REACH AND SPIKE REAL-TIME FAN REACTIONS

From December 11th 2025 to January 11th 2026.

\*From November 10 to December 10, 2025.



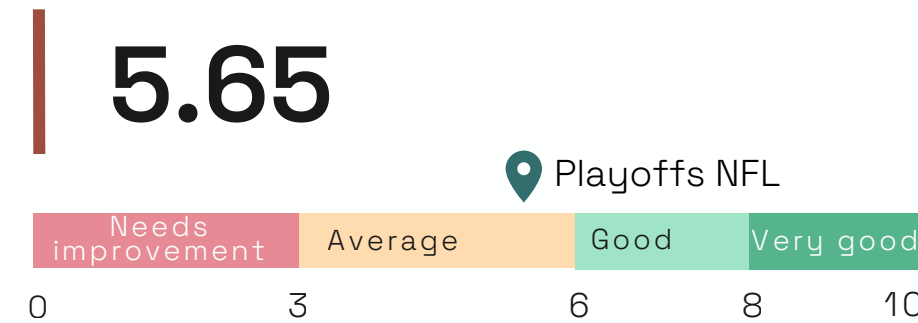
## Real-time reactions and attention spikes: how the NFL playoffs concentrated the conversation around decisive moments

Over the past month, conversations around the NFL playoffs totaled 275.5K mentions, alongside significant growth in reach (661.1M), impressions (162.3M), and unique authors (115.3K). The concentration of discussion on X (52.4%) and online news (34.4%) points to an environment driven by immediate reaction and editorial amplification, where results, brackets, and eliminations quickly gain traction. Reddit supports more sustained debate, while Instagram and YouTube function as visual impact channels, with a smaller share of total volume but the ability to generate sharp, moment-based spikes.

The main peaks during the period reinforce this pattern. Peak 1, driven by Bleacher Report content on X, is tied to the release of decisive scenarios and eliminations, prompting fast responses and short-term projections. Peak 2, associated with an Instagram post, centers on imagery and elimination narratives, generating strong visual engagement but fewer conversational follow-ups.

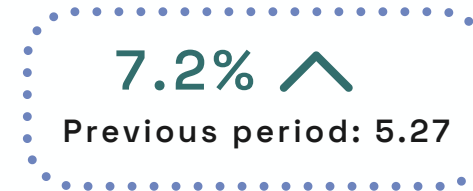
# RECORD REACH AND MIXED SIGNALS: WHAT SHAPES THE NFL PLAYOFF RESPONSE?

## Brand Health Index

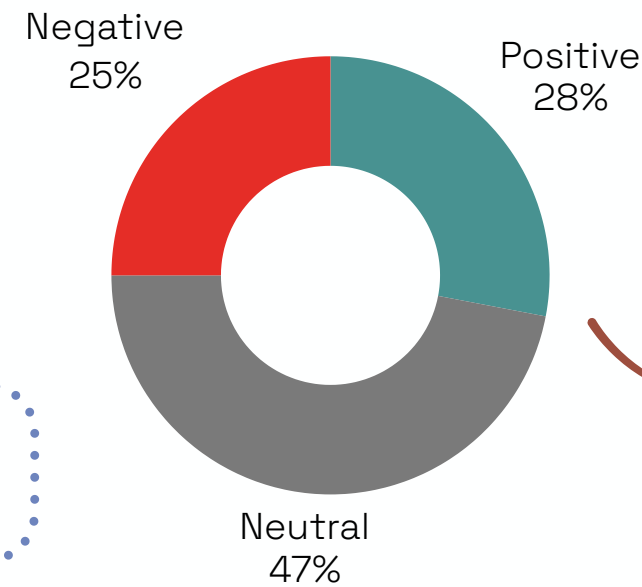


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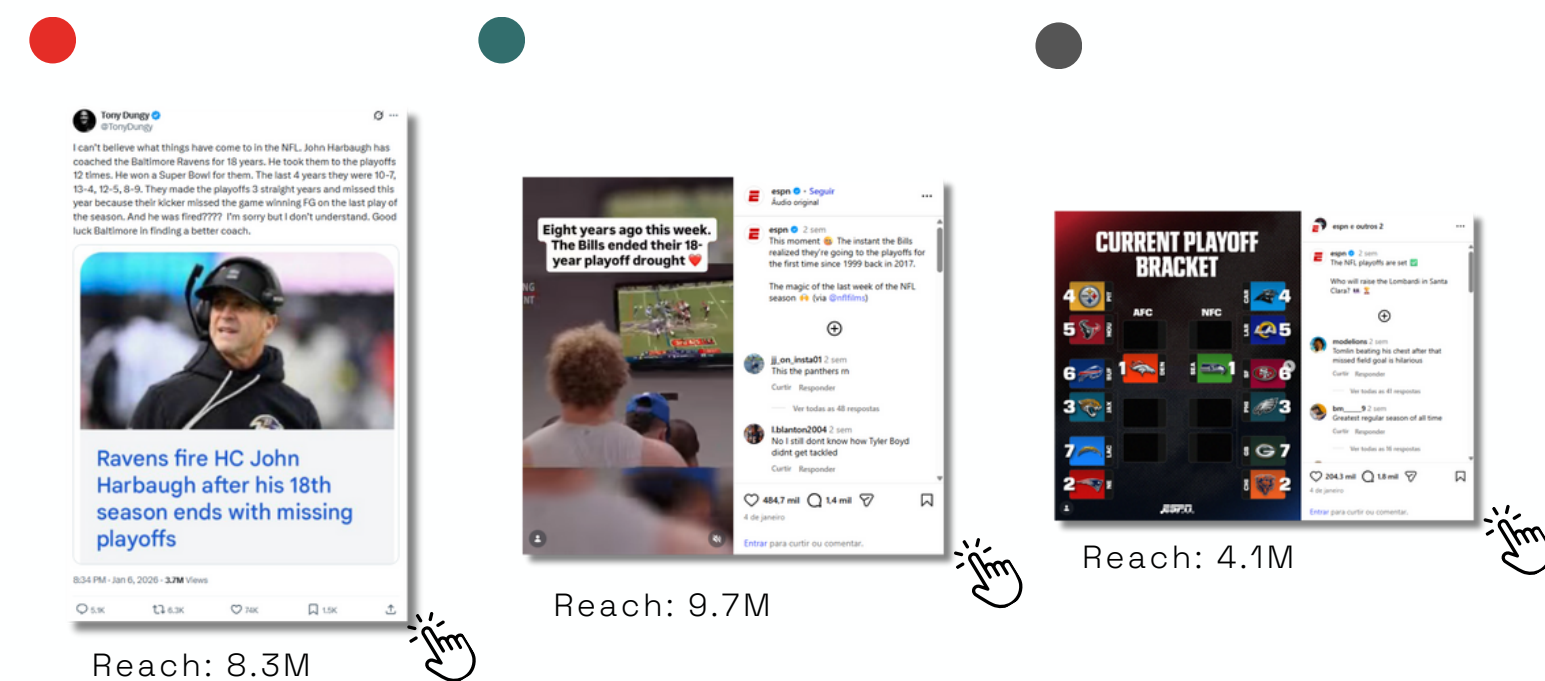
The BrandHealth Indicator is a proprietary Loxias metric that uses statistical calculations based on the polarity of mentions.



## Share by sentiment



## Highlights by sentiment



## Decisive games and eliminations shape perception and sentiment around the NFL playoffs

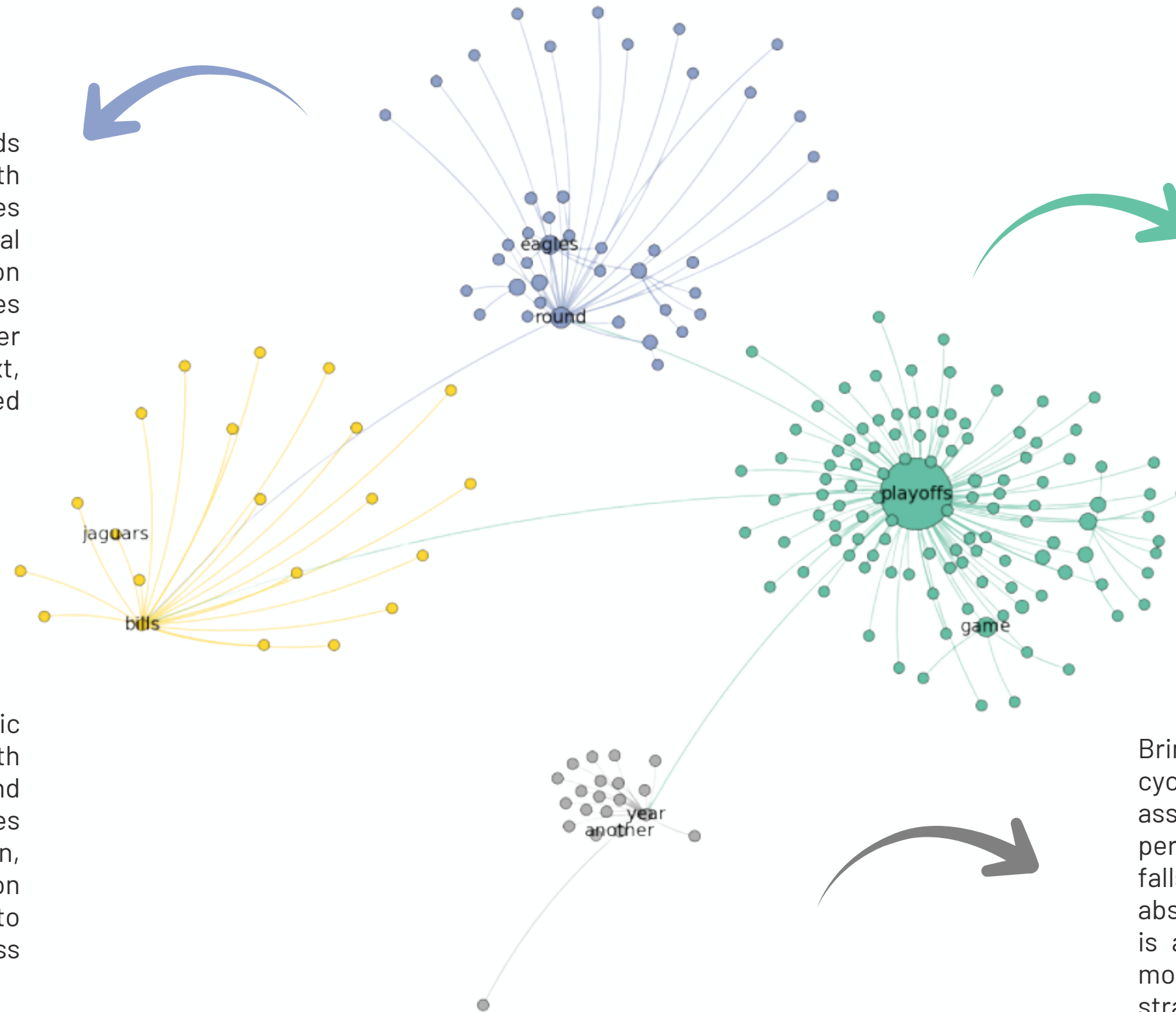
Over the past month, conversations around the NFL playoffs recorded a Brand Health Index of 5.65, up 7.2% compared to the previous period, indicating a slight improvement in narrative health. Even so, the score remains pressured by reactions to decisive games, coaching decisions, and key eliminations, which concentrated attention spikes and directly influenced perception. The sentiment split — 47% neutral, 28% positive, and 25% negative — reflects a conversation environment dominated by informational content, shaped by the coexistence of competitive excitement and frustration throughout the period.

- Negative:** Negative sentiment centers on the elimination of traditional franchises, especially the absence of the Chiefs and Ravens, alongside criticism of coaching decisions, inconsistent performance, and the playoff format itself. Discussions around competitive fairness and the inclusion of teams with questionable records also gain traction.
- Positive:** Mentions emphasize the consolidation of playoff matchups, teams returning to the postseason, and renewal narratives, with particular attention on young quarterbacks and teams entering the playoffs with late-season momentum. The tone is driven by expectation, projection, and curiosity around potential upsets.
- Neutral:** The largest share of the conversation consists of informational updates, including game results, brackets, schedules, and scenario projections. This steady flow, driven by sports outlets and official accounts, sustains overall volume and provides the structural base from which positive and negative spikes emerge, without explicit value judgment.

# FROM GAME FLOW TO FUTURE OUTLOOKS HOW PLAYOFF CONVERSATIONS TAKE SHAPE

From December 11th 2025 to January 11th 2026.

Groups discussions around decisive rounds and the historical framing of the playoffs, with emphasis on Wild Card, Eagles, and references to the Super Bowl. The debate blends factual updates with historical comparisons, season assessments, and narrative framing of games within the league's broader cycle. This cluster connects game outcomes to context, extending the conversation beyond isolated matchups.



Brings together conversations directly related to playoff games, with a focus on specific matchups and the progression of the divisional round. Terms such as Chargers, Patriots, Texans, and game structure a debate oriented toward on-field performance, pre-game expectations, and real-time interpretation of results. This cluster operates as an operational core of the conversation, concentrating immediate reactions and commentary tied to game flow.

Centers on conversations around specific matchups between the Bills and Jaguars, with strong emphasis on victory, location, and regional resonance. The cluster combines sports analysis with media amplification, reflecting how certain games gain traction beyond the field, particularly when tied to parallel narratives and circulation across media and entertainment outlets.

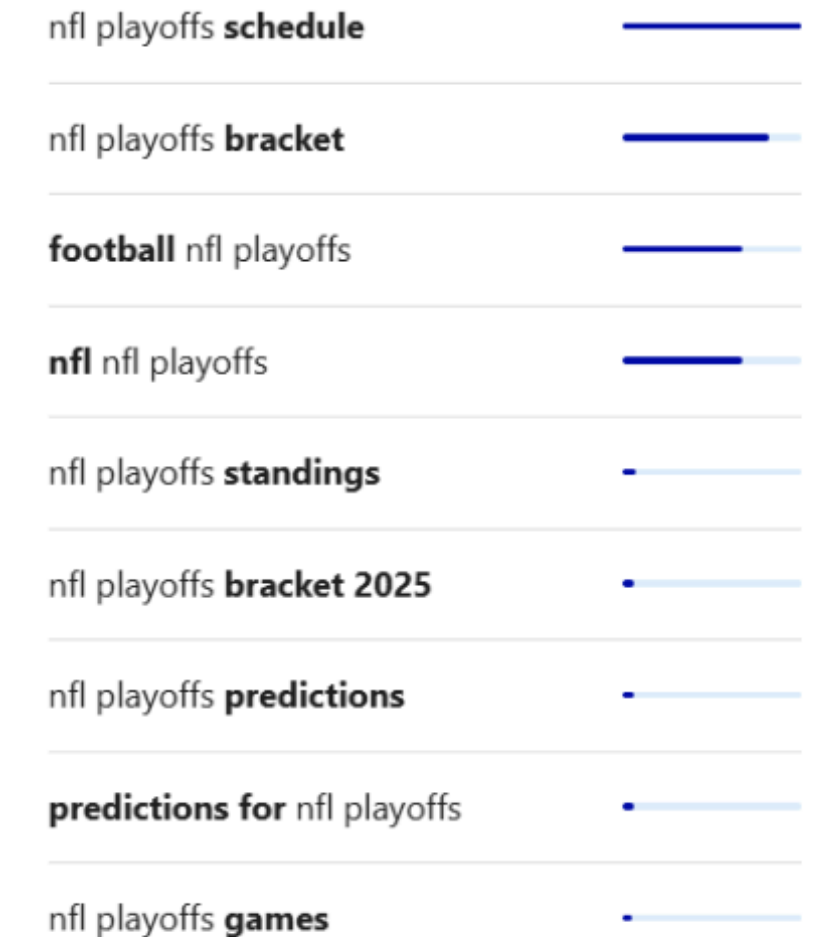
Brings together mentions related to continuity, cycles, and technical decisions, with terms associated with consecutive seasons, recurring performance, and leadership figures. The focus falls on evaluations of head coaches, playoff absences, and potential structural changes. This is a more reflective cluster, where the debate moves away from individual games and toward strategic interpretation and future outlooks.



# TRACKING THE DIGITAL PULSE OF THE NFL PLAYOFFS THROUGH SEARCH AND CONVERSATION TRENDS

## Sustained growth of digital interest in football

Online searches for NFL Playoffs began to rise at the end of the regular season and peaked with the start of the postseason, showing that interest is triggered by decisive, elimination-based moments rather than early anticipation. The most searched terms — “nfl playoffs schedule,” “bracket,” “standings,” and “predictions” — point to a clear need for real-time orientation, matchup understanding, and scenario projection. This pattern indicates an audience already familiar with the event, using search primarily to follow developments and outcomes. Overall, both the growth in volume and the type of queries confirm the NFL Playoffs as a highly tracked competitive phase.



## Brands transform the NFL playoffs into a Global Showcase

The NFL stands as one of the world’s most influential sports platforms and a powerful global stage for brands. Through the league, sponsors access a massive and highly engaged audience across broadcast, streaming, and digital channels. Visa links payments and fan experience at scale, Pepsi reinforces cultural relevance through entertainment-driven moments, and Sony amplifies the league’s audiovisual and gaming ecosystem. P&G aligns the NFL with everyday consumer routines and emotional storytelling, while Toyota associates the league with performance, reliability, and innovation. Alongside these, a broad roster of official partners, from Anheuser-Busch/Bud Light and Uber Eats to Microsoft, Verizon, FedEx, Cisco, Best Buy, USAA, DraftKings and Marriott, further enriches the league’s commercial ecosystem, creating diversified activation opportunities and deepening connection with fans worldwide.



SONY

VISA

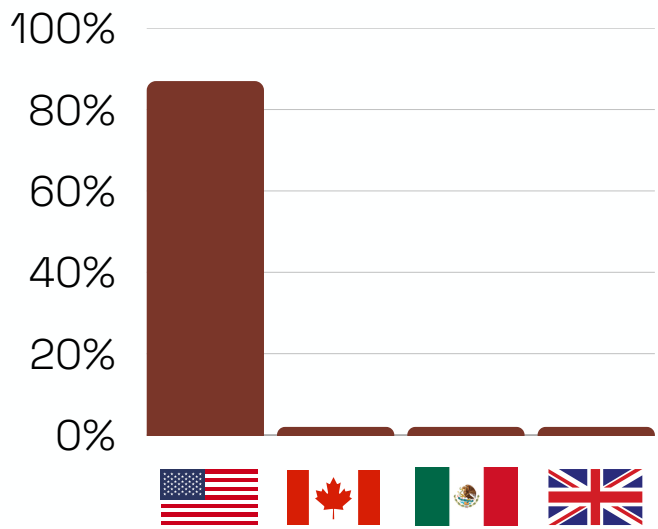
Image: Perry Knotts/NFL



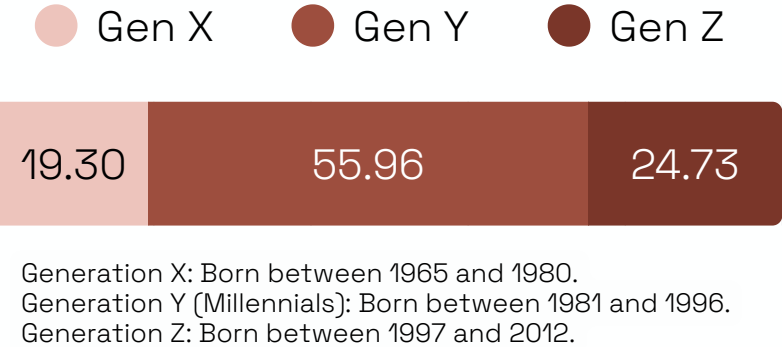


# WHO POWERS THE NFL PLAYOFFS? THE GLOBAL FAN BASE TURNING FOOTBALL INTO A CULTURAL STAGE

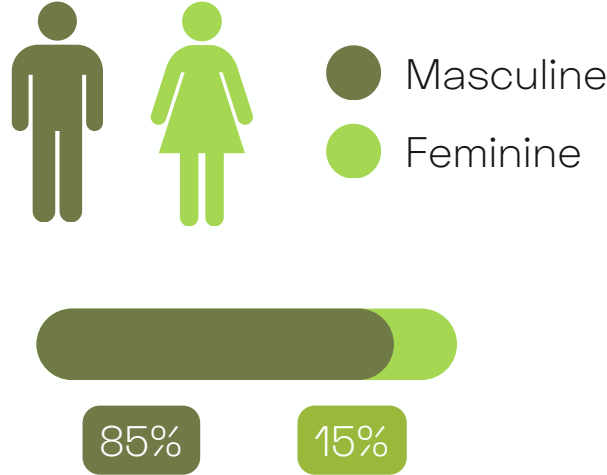
## Top countries



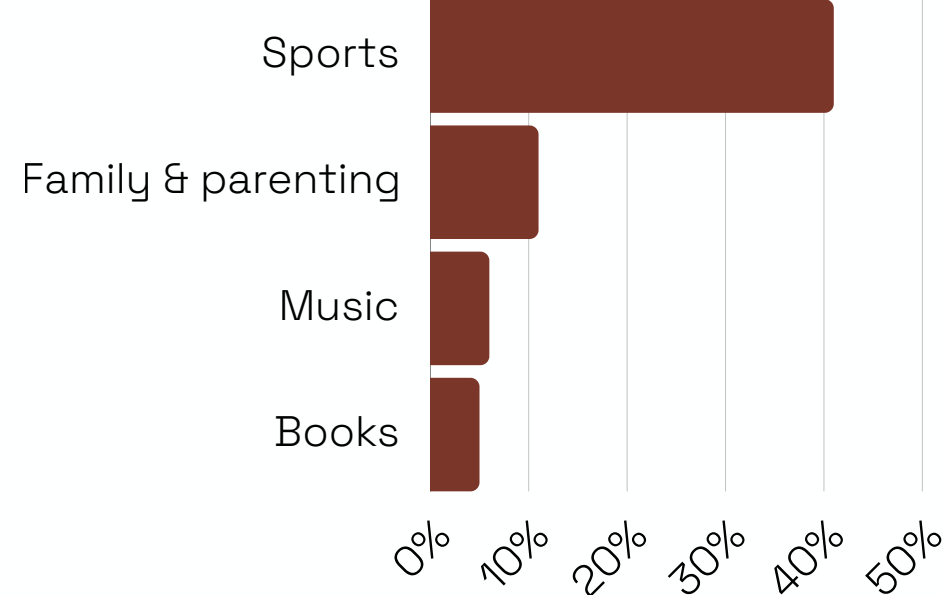
## Audience



## Gender



## Topics of interest by percentage



## Inside the Stands: The Cultural and Emotional Profile of the NFL Fan

Michael is a dedicated NFL fan who closely follows the playoffs every season, especially during the decisive weeks leading up to the Super Bowl. A Millennial with a competitive mindset and strong ties to sports culture, he grew up watching football with family and friends and still treats the playoffs as a social ritual. Sports are not only entertainment for him, but a space for emotional release, analysis, and connection with people close to him.

He values credibility, strategy, and authentic storytelling, and is drawn to brands that respect the intelligence of fans and use data to enrich the experience. Michael relies on X for real-time updates and live commentary, uses Reddit for deeper analysis, and turns to Online News for context. Instagram and YouTube complement his consumption with highlights and visual analysis.

He uses social media to stay informed, voice his perspectives, and strengthen bonds with friends and family during major games. He expects content to be timely, sharp, and insightful. Brands that activate around live moments, respect the rhythm of the games, and create shared digital experiences are far more likely to earn his attention and loyalty.



**Persona Name:** Michael Turner  
**Age:** 34  
**Gender:** Male  
**Location:** Los Angeles, California  
**Occupation:** Sports marketing executive  
**Education:** Bachelor's degree, with specialization in communication





# THE MATCH GOES ON: WHAT THE DATA SAYS ABOUT THE NFL PLAYOFFS

NFC vs. AFC: fan engagement and attention during the playoffs

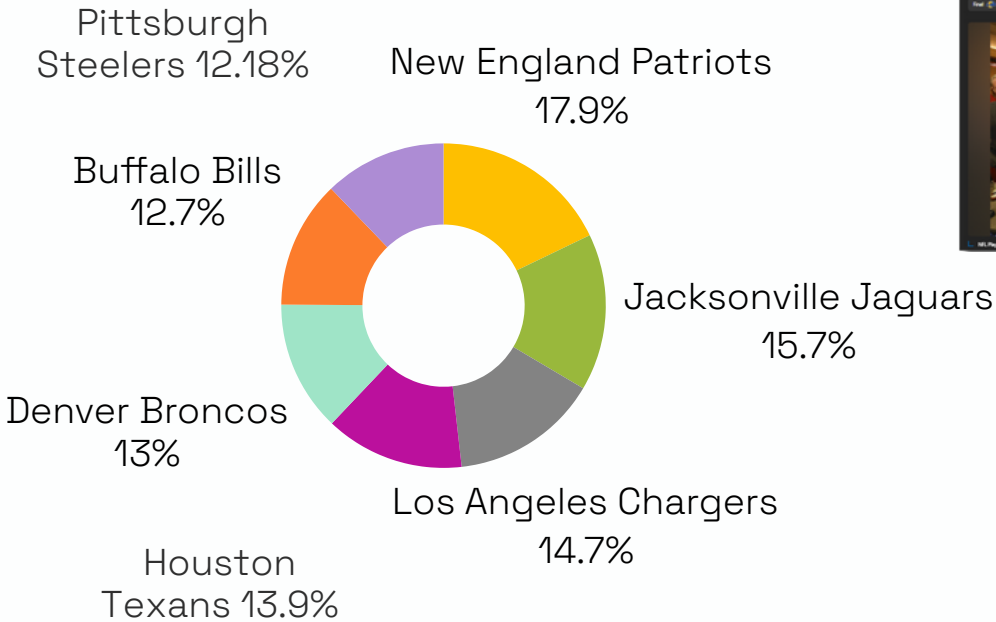
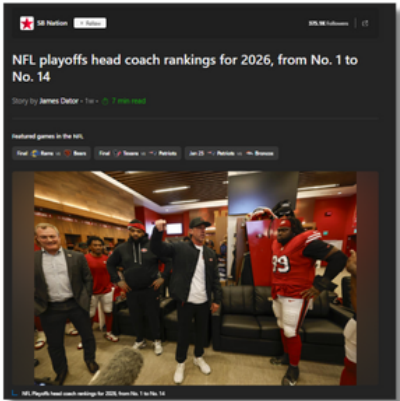


# TWO CONFERENCES, ONE SPOTLIGHT: AFC AND NFC IN THE PLAYOFFS

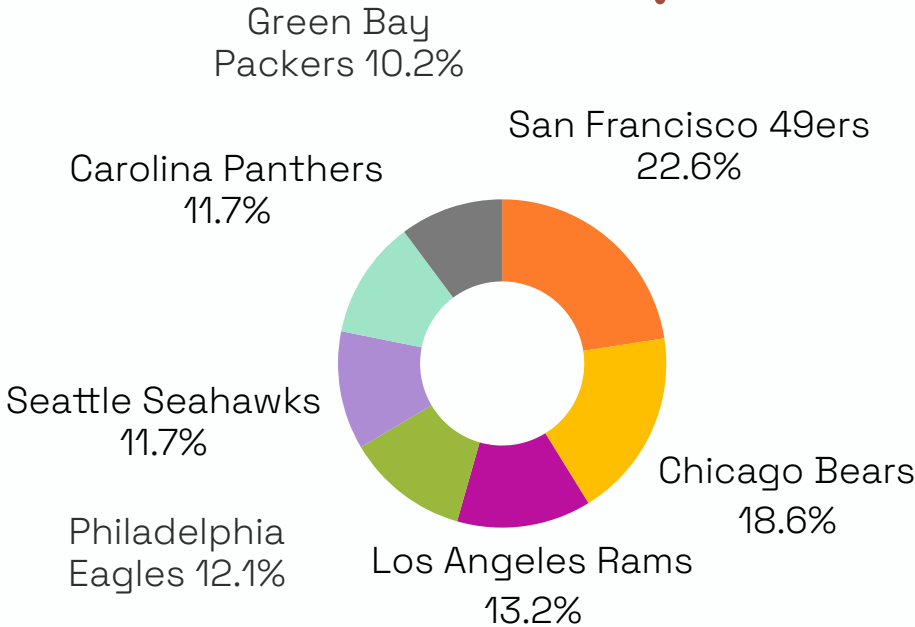
## Share by category

### AFC

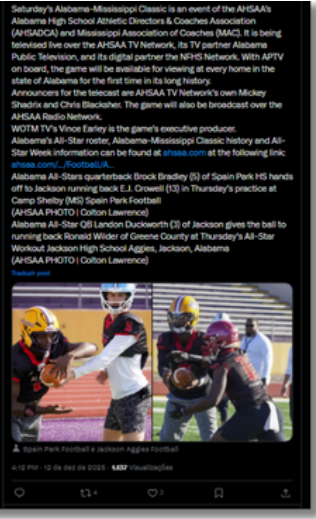
Reach: 4.2k



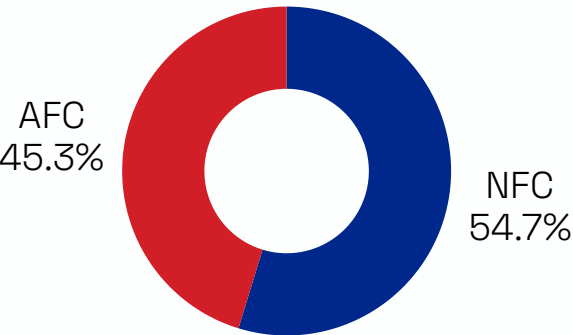
### NFC



Reach: 5.5k



### AFC vs. NFC



## Comparing Fan Attention Across Conferences

Within each conference, mentions are well distributed across multiple teams, with no extreme dominance: in the AFC, the leading team, New England Patriots, reaches 17.9% of mentions, while in the NFC, the leader San Francisco reaches 22.6%. That indicates multiple attention hubs on both sides.

At the aggregate level, however, the NFC captures 54.7% of total mentions, compared to 45.3% for the AFC. This gap is not driven by the number of teams, but by the symbolic and media strength of NFC franchises: tradition, larger markets, and narratives that are easier to amplify, which lift overall visibility without creating strong internal concentration. The AFC, by contrast, sustains engagement through a more fragmented set of contenders, distributing attention across teams and diluting total volume.



### DID YOU KNOW?

The NFL only came to have the Super Bowl as we know it today starting in 1967, when the league was still divided between the NFL and the AFL (American Football League). The first Super Bowl was not officially called the “Super Bowl” — its original name was the AFL–NFL World Championship Game. The full unification of the leagues was only completed in 1970, marking the consolidation of the modern NFL, with the establishment of the AFC and NFC, a unified schedule, and rapid growth in audience and cultural relevance.



# SCALE, TIMING, AND COMPETITIVE PRESSURE SHAPE THE NFL PLAYOFF NARRATIVE

## High scale with attention concentrated around decisive moments

During the analyzed period, NFL playoff conversations operated at a very high scale, totaling 275.5K mentions, alongside strong growth in reach and impressions and a significant presence of unique authors. This expansion, however, was not evenly distributed over time: the conversation organized itself into clearly defined spikes, triggered by decisive games, brackets, eliminations, and shifts in competitive scenarios. The key takeaway is not volume alone, but timing — attention intensifies when competitive outcomes are truly at stake.

## An ecosystem driven by immediate reaction and editorial mediation

Channel distribution shows a conversation heavily anchored in X and online news, pointing to an environment shaped by fast reactions, journalistic amplification, and collective real-time consumption. Platforms like Reddit support more sustained and analytical discussion, while Instagram and YouTube play a complementary role, generating visual impact and moment-based spikes without structuring long-term debate. As a result, the NFL emerges as an inherently synchronized phenomenon, experienced collectively and discussed at the pace of the games.

## Stable narrative health under competitive pressure

A Brand Health Index of 5.65, up 7.2% from the previous period, indicates a moderate improvement in narrative health. Even so, the score reflects a delicate balance: coaching decisions, key eliminations, and symbolic absences continue to apply pressure on perception. Predominantly neutral sentiment provides the structural base of the conversation, while positive and negative reactions fluctuate as the competition unfolds, with no single polarity dominating the overall reading.

## A global showcase with multiple attention hubs

The AFC versus NFC comparison reveals an internally balanced landscape, with the NFC holding an aggregate advantage in total mention volume. This gap is not driven by extreme concentration around a single team, but by the symbolic and media strength of franchises with deeper traditions and larger markets. The result is an ecosystem with multiple attention hubs, capable of sustaining continuous interest without reliance on a single protagonist.

## Conclusion

The data shows that the NFL playoffs have consolidated their role as an event of high symbolic intensity, where scale, timing, and narrative structure matter as much as on-field performance. Reception is defined less by consensus and more by a dynamic balance between information, expectation, and frustration — a scenario that sustains engagement, extends conversation longevity, and reinforces the NFL's position as a central stage in contemporary sports culture.



image: Canva's licensed library.

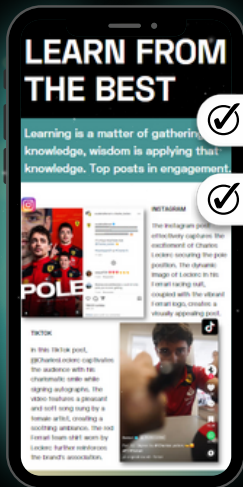


WHO WE ARE

Loxias.ai combines 10 years of experience in social media technology inherited from its mother Polis Consulting with leading AI driven Social Media monitoring and analytics platforms, a robust proprietary methodology and its experienced and highly motivated team of social media analysts and data scientists.

Our innovative solution combines state of art multi-channel monitoring tools with a robust proprietary methodology and qualified human expertise – everything is just a few clicks away through our e-commerce platform.

DEMOCRATIZING ENTERPRISE DATA AND INSIGHTS  
WITH INTELLIGENCE POWERED BY AI



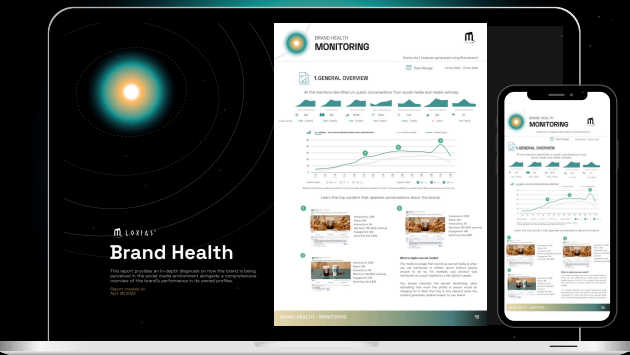
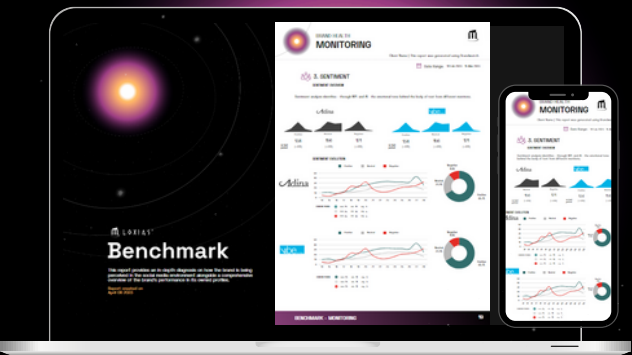
Loxias utilizes exclusive AI methodology and skilled data analysts to assist brands and companies in comprehending market trends and shifts in social media and public conversations, providing valuable business insights.

In-deph analysis of a particular brand  
in the social media landscape

OUR PRODUCTS

**Benchmark**  
Discover brand narratives, compare customer perceptions.

**Brand Health**  
Comprehensive overview of the brand's across Monitoring.



- Monthly, weekly and daily Reports tracking and analyzing the overall Brand Health
- Ad hoc Reports on specific matters of interest
- Real time monitoring for sentiment analysis, crisis detection and crisis management

Receive your report in 72h  
\*Business hours (EDT/EST), once the parameters are approved by our experts



THANK YOU\_

